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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7821
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY 0242
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0291
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0622
RHMFIASS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIASS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0361
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0736

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000668

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ABDALLAHI TRANSFERRED TO NATIVE VILLAGE
AND PLACED UNDER HOUSE ARREST

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Local media outlets have reported that President Abdallahi was transferred from Nouakchott during the night of November 12-13 to his native village of Lemden and placed under house arrest. LES contacts have independently confirmed the reports through indirect communication with Abdallahi's daughter. Abdallahi's transfer comes after spending more than three months under house arrest at the Palais de Congres in Nouakchott.

¶2. (C) President Abdallahi's native village of Lemden is located about 250km southeast of Nouakchott off the main road between Boutlimit and Aleg. Press reports state that he was escorted in the middle of the night to Lemden by Col. Mohamed Ould Meguett of the military junta (High State Council) and guards from the presidential security battalion (BASEP). Abdallahi is supposedly able to receive visits from family members; however, it is unknown at this time if he will be able to receive visits from friends, political allies, or foreign diplomats. A small delegation of the anti-coup FNDD composed of Mohamed Ould Maouloud Ahmed Ould Sidi Baba, and Moyhedine Ould Sidi Baba (and possibly others) is currently headed to Lemden to attempt to visit the President and hold a press conference this evening.

¶3. (C) During a previously arranged meeting with President of the National Assembly Ould Boulkheir, Charge learned that the President had already been able to speak to the collected FNDD leadership by phone this morning. The FNDD leadership plans to travel to the President's village this afternoon to test the conditions of the President's contention. Abdallahi had been told he had "all liberties" except that he could not leave his village. Ould Boulkheir said that a request by his wife and children to visit the President had been denied by the regime. The FNDD leadership does not expect to be successful in their efforts to meet the President, but want to prove the point he is still detained. Ould Boulkheir thought the President had surreptitious access to a phone, but in the middle of the meeting President Abdallahi was heard doing a telephone interview with Al Jazeera so, presumably, the phone is no longer hidden. Ould Boulkheir was pleased that the President re-stated his status as the continuing President of Mauritania and avoided taking a position on next-steps -- Abdallahi said he only knew what he had heard through the radio and would have to meet with his advisors before discussing the political path forward. Ould Boulkheir was annoyed that the Al Jezeera television anchor spent over half the interview challenging the President for

his "blockage of parliament" before the coup. Charge urged Ould Boulkheir, if he is able to meet with the President, not to allow the debate to revert to the torturous details of the political process before August 6 but to turn the debate forward to the larger issue of the preservation and reinforcement of democracy.

14. (C) Comment: The removal of Abdallahi from Nouakchott continues President Taya's practice of sending rivals to the interior and placing them under house arrest as the regime has done over the past two months with Prime Minister Waghef. It appears the President will still be severely constrained in his liberties although the regime has already lost the ability to communicate with his supporters and the outside world. The change should not substantially change the position of the European Union during its November 20 meeting unless the President truly has freedom of movement and communication. It is unclear why the regime chose to transfer the President now. As President Abdallahi's transfer comes one week before the EU ultimatum on November 20, the military junta will undoubtedly attempt to use Abdallahi's "liberation" to their own advantage. International pressure probably played some role in the transfer of Abdallahi. However, more practical reasons may have been at work. The "national dialogue on democracy" scheduled to take place soon will be held at the Palais de Congres -- the presence of a deposed president under house arrest at the same venue would hardly present the image of national dialogue that the military junta wishes to project.

End comment.

HANKINS